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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/26/2022
TAGS: MARR PREL PTER MOPS IZ TU
SUBJECT: USAFE GENERAL HOBBINS DISCUSSES IRAQ AIR
RECONNAISSANCE ISSUES WITH TURKISH GENERAL STAFF

Classified By: AMB Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: Turkish Chief of Defense Gen Buyukanit and Turkish Air Force Chief Comert told USAFE Commander Gen Hobbins June 22 that Turkey is sensitive about U.S. reconnaissance and other aircraft operating close to the Turkish border in northern Iraq. Buyukanit warned that even small incidents are now very sensitive in Turkish public opinion and urged the U.S. to be cautious. Hobbins assured the Turks that the recce flights are not directed against Turkey but aim to gather information on the PKK that is shared with Turkey. He encouraged the Turkish officers to take advantage of the direct phone line established between al-Udeid and Diyarbakir air control authorities and noted that we share our Air Tasking Order for Iraq missions. Gen Hobbins thanked the officers for extending U.S. use of the Incirlik air hub and for the opportunity to participate in the Anatolian Eagle air exercise in Konya. He said his staff would contact Turkish counterparts about the possibility of U.S. participants remaining a short time after the exercise for additional training. End summary

¶2. (S/NF) CHOD Buyukanit told Gen Hobbins he personally was not concerned that U.S. recce flights in northern Iraq were collecting against Turkey and understood that border violations could happen given the rough terrain. The issue is sensitive for Turkish public opinion, however, and he observed that even small problems are now very sensitive, especially in public opinion. Addressing U.S.-Turkey relations, Buyukanit expressed satisfaction with bilateral military cooperation. However, there are problems in "other spheres" and, Buyukanit remarked, "certain circles" are trying to foment discord in the relationship. Buyukanit pointedly stated twice that the U.S. must be very careful. Turkey and the U.S. are 50-year allies; we must avoid misunderstandings that would jeopardize this.

¶3. (S/NF) Gen Hobbins emphasized that U.S. recce flights in northern Iraq are not directed against Turkey; rather, they are collecting intelligence on PKK activities which we share with Turkey. He noted that we share the daily Air Tasking Order, covering U.S. air missions near the Turkish border, and have established a direct phone line between Turkish military air controllers at Diyarbakir and MNF-I controllers at al-Udeid. He encouraged maximum use of those coordination mechanisms. He pledged to look at ways to work with Turkey to improve information exchange on flights operating near the

border.

¶4. (C) Gen Hobbins expressed U.S. appreciation for the extension of U.S. permission to use the Incirlik air hub and for the invitation to participate in the annual Anatolian Eagle multinational air exercise currently underway in Konya. He asked if Turkish officials would consider allowing U.S. aircraft and crews to remain in Konya for a short time after the exercise to conduct further training, and stated that his staff would be in touch with Turkish counterparts to discuss this.

¶5. (S/NF) In a separate meeting, Turkish Air Force commander Gen Comert told Gen Hobbins that Turkey is very sensitive to U.S. aircraft operating in Iraq flying close to its border. He cited the accidental airspace violation by two U.S. F-16s on May 24 as well as U.S. helicopter operations within 5 nautical miles (NM) of the border on June 14. He cited another intelligence gathering flight on June 16 about which Turkey was not informed. He complained that Turkey does not regard these flights as friendly.

¶6. (S/NF) Gen Hobbins responded that the F-16 and other flights were tasked with gathering intelligence on PKK activities in northern Iraq that would then be shared with the Turkish government. Comert complained that the intelligence shared with Turkey is often two months old; Turkey would prefer fresher intelligence. Ambassador noted that the U.S. was working on ways to ensure Turkey has access to more recent intelligence on the PKK. Gen Hobbins reported that a EUCOM JAC briefing team would come to Turkey the week of June 25 to provide the latest detailed intelligence on the PKK derived from those missions.

¶7. (S/NF) Comert noted that the ATO data Turkey receives is only for air activity within 5 NM of the border and suggested Turkey be informed of missions up to 10 NM from the border. He said advance notification of recce and other flights operating near Turkey's borders would help reduce Turkey's concerns. Special flights should be notified both to the Turkish military air traffic control center in Diyarbakir as well as Turkish Air Force headquarters in Ankara. He said that, with proper advance clearance, U.S. aircraft could even be allowed to use Turkish airspace. He offered that Turkey would even be willing to conduct recce flights over northern Iraq, with U.S. permission, and would share resulting intelligence with the U.S. Gen Hobbins promised to coordinate with USAFE and U.S. CENTCOM intelligence experts to see if more detail on recce missions could be provided to Turkey.

¶8. (C) Turning to the situation in Iraq, Comert remarked that, during the Saddam era, Turkey had enjoyed USD 40 billion in trade with Iraq and had experienced few problems. Today, Turkey confronts PKK violence and Kurdish preparations for an independent state, which could destabilize Turkey. The U.S. seems to prefer helping the Kurds more than Turkey. The U.S., Comert asserted, must make a decision to help Turkey confront these problems. Ambassador told Comert that we cannot turn back the clock on Iraq but that Turkey and the U.S. shared the same goal of a unified and successful Iraq. We need Turkey's cooperation to achieve this and our actions must be mutually reinforcing to this end. Gen Hobbins assured Comert that the U.S. considers Turkey an important country and key ally.

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